



Unit 49 – Gradable Adjectives (*it was absolutely incredible.. he ran very fast today..*)

A) Most common adjectives can express various degrees of *conditions, properties, qualities, relations, states*, etc. using grading adverbs such as **rather** or **very**. These are called gradable adjectives. For example:

-> It's **extremely cold** outside. This assignment is **a bit difficult**. He was **rather quiet** in class.

Grading Adverbs: **a bit, a little, extremely, fairly, hugely, immensely, intensely, rather, reasonably, slightly, unusually, very** Gradable Adjectives: **angry, big, busy, cheap, common, different, expensive, fast, friendly, happy, important, low, popular, quiet, rich, strong, tasty, young**

Non-gradable: absolute adjectives – these adjectives describe absolute qualities. For example, something can't be **a bit** finished or **very** finished. To make them stronger, we use modifiers like **absolutely, totally** or **completely**.

-> Thank you! The report is **absolutely perfect**. -> Their house was **totally destroyed** by a fire.

Non-Gradable Adverbs: **absolutely, completely, entirely, perfectly, practically, simply, totally, utterly, virtually** Non-Gradable Adjectives: **alive, dead, certain, correct, finished, huge, impossible, perfect, unique, unknown, wrong**

Non-gradable: extreme adjectives – Adjectives like **amazing** and **exceptional** are also non-gradable. They already convey the idea of 'very' in their definitions. To make them even stronger, we must use **absolutely, really, etc.**:

Modifiers: **absolutely, really, simply, totally, utterly** Adjectives: **amazing, delicious, enormous, excellent, exhausted, fascinating, freezing, gorgeous, terrifying, tiny, etc.**

Note: -> 'classifying' adjectives are also non-gradable and are combined with adverbs such as **almost, mainly**, etc.

Modifiers: **almost, essentially, exclusively, fully, largely, mainly, nearly, primarily** Adjectives: **chemical, complete, digital, domestic, environmental, medical, maximum, minimum, scientific, underlying**

B) Adverbs used with both gradable and non-gradable adjectives – the adverbs **really** (*very much*), **fairly** and **pretty** (both meaning 'to a certain extent, but less than very') can be used with gradable and non-gradable adjectives:

Gradable	Non-gradable
That's a high-end brand. It's really expensive .	Put on a coat! It's really freezing out there!
You'd better attend the meeting. It's fairly important .	Mary seemed to be fairly certain that she's correct.
We had a great time! Everyone was pretty friendly .	I'll never bungee jump again. It was pretty terrifying!

Quite – the sense of the adverb *quite* changes with the 'gradability' of the adjective that it modifies. Compare:

Example:	Adjective	Sense
Let's take the subway. The roads are quite busy today.	Gradable	<i>fairly, rather</i>
Thanks for dinner, mom. It was quite delicious!	Non-gradable	<i>absolutely, really</i>

C) Some adjectives convey a similar meaning when they are gradable or non-gradable. Compare the differences:

i) Gradable – we focus on the quality ('qualitative adjectives') and therefore they can be used with an adverb:

-> The advertisement for the jacket sounded **quite genuine**. (*genuine = sincere, trustworthy*)

ii) Non-gradable – we focus on the category or type ('classifying adjectives') that the adjective belongs to:

-> This jacket is made of **genuine leather**. (*genuine = authentic, real, actual*)

Also: *academic, adult, average, diplomatic, guilty, human, individual, innocent, mobile, private, professional, scientific, technical, true, wild*

D) Colloquial Adjectives – In casual, spoken, English we can use a general gradable adjective such as **good, lovely, nice**, etc. with another gradable adjective in order to better emphasize the second adjective:

-> **Good + ready, stable, strong**, etc.: When you're **good and ready**, you can begin your test.

-> **Lovely + comfortable, kind, smart**, etc.: The bread from this bakery is always **lovely and fresh!**

-> **Nice + bright, early, fresh, warm**, etc.: We got up **nice and early** today and went to the market.

Tip: -> In a very colloquial sense, we can also use **more and more, louder and louder**, etc. to emphasize *emotion*.



Unit 49 – Exercises:

49.1 – Fill in the blanks with **very** or **absolutely** + the most appropriate word from the box below. **(49-A)**

pretty / funny / interesting / filthy / exhausted / freezing / cold / beautiful / fascinating / hilarious / small / tired

1. She is always **very pretty**, but when she dresses up and puts makeup on, she's _____!
2. You'd better put that shirt in the washing machine right away. It's _____!
3. Sue thought the museum was _____ but I thought it was _____. I didn't want to leave!
4. The apartments are _____ in this building, which is fine for one person living alone.
5. Jerry is _____ but his brother is _____! He's one of the funniest people I've ever met.
6. I had a long day and I'm _____. If I don't sleep well tonight, I'll be _____ tomorrow.
7. It gets _____ in New York in the winter, but in Toronto it gets _____ for long periods.

49.2 – Complete the three sentences that contain gradable adjectives with **very**. Complete the others with the most suitable of the following adverbs: **essentially, fully, mainly, almost, exclusively**. **(49-A)**

1. The group of voters in this area is **mainly** black, working-class.
2. From the time that I used to go there, the school appeared to be _____ unchanged.
3. Lisa doesn't have the best relationship with her father, but she's _____ close with her mother.
4. The machines on this factory floor are _____ automatic.
5. We sat down on a tree stump and ate some _____ tasty ham sandwiches.
6. *Augusta National* golf club was once _____ male, but has opened to females in recent years.
7. The project isn't quite done yet but we are _____ complete.
8. As soon as we mentioned the trip to beach, the children got _____ excited!

49.3 – Underline the correct or appropriate adverbs in the following sentences. **(49-B)**

1. Malaria is still **pretty** / **fairly** common in many parts of Africa. (*both pretty and fairly are possible*)
2. What an incredible game. The final seconds were fairly / pretty unbelievable!
3. Although my car is really / very old, it still runs very well.
4. The conditions were fairly / really excellent for surfing today.
5. Getting Mr. Johnson's agreement is pretty / very essential to finalize this deal.
6. The students kept very / pretty quiet during their examination.
7. His daughter's performance as Juliet was fairly / really captivating.
8. They never expected to own their own home. The news was pretty / fairly overwhelming!

49.4 – Complete each pair of sentences using the **adverb / adjective** pairs from the box. **(49-C)**

(**pretty wild** / wild) (completely innocent / innocent) (highly technical / technical) (fairly diplomatic / diplomatic)

1. a) The weather was **pretty wild** again last night with that thunder and lightening storm.
b) We saw a flock of _____ geese fly overhead this morning.
2. a) The conversation was getting _____ for me, so I let the engineers continue talking.
b) The job ad mentions that it is a _____ position in a new start-up company.
3. a) The two countries agreed to establish _____ relations.
b) Mark would be well-suited for the position. He's _____ in communicating with others.
4. a) She hadn't done anything and was _____, but how could she prove it?
b) The accused criminal had defrauded his _____ victims of millions of dollars.

49.5 – Answer the following questions using an **adverb + adjective** combination. How would you feel if... **(49-all)**

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|---|------------------|
| 1. ...you just lost a winning lottery ticket? | 1. I'd be _____. |
| 2. ...a total stranger tells you you're beautiful/handsome? | 2. _____. |
| 3. ...your favorite team just won a world championship? | 3. _____. |